

My Boys by **PlaidDino**

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Family, Hurt-Comfort

Language: English

Characters: Jonathan B., Joyce B., Will B.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2016-11-29 19:49:51

Updated: 2017-03-13 01:29:30

Packaged: 2019-12-17 15:16:15

Rating: K+

Chapters: 6

Words: 11,191

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: A collection of one-shots surrounding Joyce and her two sons.

1. Make Him Laugh

"He's amazing. Oh wow, Lonnie. Just look at him." Joyce couldn't get enough of the infant. Lonnie would just laugh, glancing up from his newspaper. Little Jonathan was six months old, and she still marveled at him on a daily basis. This was her baby. Her first one. She gave birth to this human being, and he was her's to love. The solemn child would stare intently on his mother as she cooed and doted on him, and would seldom even smile, even when tried her hardest to get him to laugh.

She wanted to make him laugh. Even if she looked ridiculous trying. She would spend hours making silly faces and talking to him in different voices. But he was just a serious child. He would watch his parents going about their day with an intent gaze, and sometimes he would frown so seriously, it looked like he was deep in contemplation. He also cried a lot.

Sometimes he would cry and cry and cry for agonizingly long periods of time, and nothing would stop him. Thankfully, this was usually when Lonnie was at work. All Joyce cared about when he cried was making sure he was okay. Lonnie, on the other hand, couldn't stand the noise. It made her anxious when he cried around Lonnie.

"What's the matter, baby?" She would ask, bouncing him in her arms and offering him a bottle, which he refused. "Are you tired? Oh... hush, it's gonna be okay. Mommy's here. Please, baby. Please calm down."

Then Lonnie would snap. He would slap down whatever he was holding and storm at the shaking, small woman, frowning like a thunderstorm. "Would you get him to shut up!?" He would shout. So, so loud. Jonathan would cry louder. Lonnie usually would leave the house to go for a drive if he didn't stop in the next minute. With him gone, Joyce would tenderly tend to the infant's every need, still shaking with anxiety and worry.

Other times, she would leave the house with Jonathan, because Lonnie was tired from work and wanted to relax at home. She would walk him around outside, still shushing him. She would cry a little

too sometimes, because she hated that their son's crying was considered just a racket disturbing Lonnie's peace. To her, it was something so important. He cried because he needed them, and he needed to be cared for. It wasn't just noise-it was her boy needing her. She didn't want anything to stop her boy from calling for help.

As Jonathan grew older, he became more and more like a small adult. He was so young, but he was still so serious. He didn't always let her smother him; he liked his space, and was growing more and more independent. He would go missing at random intervals, scaring Joyce almost into a panic, only to be found sitting outside on the ground, looking at the trees. More than anything, Joyce wanted to make him laugh. Tickles, silly knock-knock jokes, and her funny voices would sometimes bring a small smile. It would make her swell with joy. But she hadn't heard him laugh.

That is, until he was nearly one and a half. She would put the TV on in the living room, and play cartoons for him as he played. She liked the cartoons herself, and would always wear an amused smile at the antics of the animated characters. Jonathan would look at the screen, glance back at her, and smile too. After a while, he became more interested in the cartoons, inching closer to the TV and watching for longer periods of time.

Then one day, she heard it. She was in the kitchen, smoking a cigarette, when a small giggle slipped out. She could hear the recognizable voice of Donald Duck, sputtering angrily as he often did, and she put out the cigarette and walked over, as Jonathan's giggled more, then started bursting into a fit of laughter.

Joyce could never quite remember what exactly Donald Duck was doing in this particular cartoon, but all that mattered was how amusing her son found it. Not just amusing. Hilarious. Joyce joined him on the floor, laughing with joy, pride, and amusement with him. He laughed more. It was contagious. Joyce found herself laughing harder and harder. She grabbed him by the sides playfully, and he shrieked with laughter as he fell over on top of her. She couldn't have felt happier. It was like all of her anxiety was washed away by the love of that small voice, and his small hands.

He didn't always laugh. He would still sit and stare, he would still

move away from Joyce's arms at times when he wasn't in the mood for a hug, but those moments where mother and son shared in beautiful joy became more often after that one cartoon. Jonathan would take her by the arm to bring her in the living room, so they could watch cartoons together. They laughed. He would sit leaning against her, or sometimes in her lap. Every day, even though she didn't always say it, she still marveled at her son. He was simply amazing.

2. Sibling Dynamics, Part I

A/N: OKAY SO yesterday I had planned for Part I and Part II to be in just one chapter, and it was 80% finished, when I accidentally lost it. So I had to, uh, (excuse me for a second as I *SCREAMS INTO PILLOW*) rewrite it. So I'm splitting it into two parts because I got a little low of morale to rewrite it all at once, and they are two separate events anyway. I feel like my original was better, but y,know.

Thank you all for your reviews/follows/favorites/eyeballs that read my stories! It is very encouraging and gives me good vibes. I hope I share some good vibes with y,all as well! Thanks for reading! -PlaidDino

Having a little brother was not all it was cracked up to be. In fact, it kind of sucked sometimes. At least, that's how Jonathan felt at one point. He was being pushed on edge. Will followed him everywhere, did everything he did, and whatever Jonathan had, he wanted it too. It was just starting to get on Jonathan's nerves.

The worst part about it was how easily upset Will could be. Jonathan would just be trying to set his boundaries, and then later on, their mother would descend upon him with protective ferocity because he made Will cry. She *always* defended Will, and made Jonathan apologize every time, even when it wasn't his fault.

Jonathan started to get secretive about doing anything, just so that Will wouldn't want to tag along. One day, he headed for the front door, hiding his disposable camera in front of him. Recently, since Jonathan was interested in photography, Will had to take an interest in it too. Instantly, as he reached for the door handle, Will appeared beside him. It almost seemed like the kid could teleport to any point of interest when he was curious. "Where are you going?" He asked. Jonathan tensed, then turned to face him, slipping his camera behind his back. "I'm just going outside."

"Can I come?"

"No."

"Why not?"

Jonathan knew he was treading on thin ice. He weighed his words carefully. "I want to be alone right now." He answered truthfully. Will looked visibly disappointed. He was learning to handle disappointment a lot better than he ever used to, given the harsh instructions Lonnie would occasionally give him to help him "man up", but he was still just as sensitive. Jonathan started to feel a little bad. He cleared his throat. "Just for a little while. When I get back, we can do anything you want. Okay?"

Will nodded slightly, looking down at his shoes. Feeling satisfied with the compromise he had given, Jonathan then quickly slipped out the door.

When he returned, it turned out he still hadn't been nice enough to evade a scolding from their mom. He walked in, and was grabbed by the arm while he was trying to get to his room. "You need to spend more time with your brother." Joyce said quietly, but sternly. Jonathan pulled back against her grip, frowning. "I'm going to!" He replied. "Then why didn't you let him go with you?" She asked.

"I don't want him messing with my camera." Jonathan hissed, clutching at his disposable camera as if he was anticipating her to take it from him. "He won't. I'll talk to him about it." Joyce said, loosening her grip on him. Jonathan rolled his eyes doubtfully. Joyce was worried about him. It wasn't like him to be so irritable. Ever since he started seventh grade he had become more and more on edge. "Are you doing okay?" She asked.

"Yeah. I'm fine." He quickly replied, brushing past her to go to his room. "How is school?" She pressed. He stopped, cringing inwardly. He knew that tone—she was worrying about him, and looking for a problem. The last thing he wanted to do was talk about school. He thought hard about a good answer that would set his mother at ease. He turned to face her and gave a small smile. The smile always worked. "School's great."

She let out a sigh of relief. She visibly relaxed. "Good." She breathed,

loosing most of the tension in her shoulders. Jonathan, feeling satisfied at having put away his mom's anxiety for the time being, gave her a small nod, and finally retreated to his bedroom. His safe place. He plopped down on his bed and looked up at the ceiling, fingering his camera absent-mindedly. He could feel the presence of his little brother lurking just outside the doorway. He sighed and put his camera beside his bed, then he sat up. "You can come in." He said.

Will ghosted inside, and sat down on the floor, smiling cautiously. "It's nice outside. Did you take any pictures?" He asked, glancing out the window. The sun was getting lower and lower by this point. He looked up at Jonathan from his seat on the floor. "Um... Yeah. Listen, you can sit up here." Jonathan said, moving over so Will could sit on the bed too. Will looked as if he had just been bestowed a great honor. He quickly got up and sat next to him, his eyes wide. "You know, you don't have to act interested in photography just because I like it." Jonathan said. Will started to look a little hurt. Jonathan quickly retracted. "I mean, unless you *really* do like it. I take pictures because I enjoy it, and, um... I think I'm pretty good at it."

"You are!" Will chimed in. "Yeah..." Jonathan looked down at his feet, smiling ever so slightly, "I guess what I'm saying is, we can do stuff together that you like to do, you know?"

Will's eyes opened wider than ever. "Really?" he asked, his voice pitching a little higher with excitement. Jonathan shrugged and nodded. "Yeah."

"Right now?"

"You name it."

Will slid off the bed and pulled a box out from under Jonathan's bed. His old action figures. They had been collecting dust as of recently. Will always looked at them as if they were made of pure gold. He looked up at Jonathan imploringly, silently asking "Can I?"

Jonathan laughed. Of course. He figured it was about time the poor kid got to play with the figures. Years before he was strictly forbidden to even touch them. He got off his bed and sat down next to Will, and they started to take out the toys together.

3. Sibling Dynamics, Part II

Jonathan had loosened his rules a little, mostly because Will had difficulty following them. He just enforced three rules:

1. Don't enter his room when he isn't there.
2. Don't borrow his things without asking.
3. Never, under any circumstances, touch or use his camera.

Will considered himself to be a rule follower. He didn't like to make anyone angry. Especially Jonathan. But he just couldn't reason in his mind why those rules were there. He could understand asking to borrow things before taking them, and he usually made sure to do so. But sometimes he would be too impatient, and he would try to borrow things from Jonathan's room in secret, just while he wasn't there. Usually he wasn't caught, much to his relief. Sometimes when Jonathan was gone he would just sit in his room and admire the comforter on the bed, as he drew pictures of his favorite characters, and scenes from his favorite science fiction movies.

Everything that belonged to Jonathan seemed special to Will. He couldn't explain it. Jonathan was probably the coolest person he knew, so everything he had was utterly fascinating. Later, in hindsight as Will grew older, he realized how unreasonable his behavior had been. He would regret pushing Jonathan on edge so many times, and be hesitant to borrow anything from him to make up for years past. But back then, he couldn't manage to understand why he had been banished from certain things, and it made them all the more interesting. Especially that camera. It had its own special rule, so was most definitely special. He was curious, and wanted to see what it was like to use it. Just once.

Will got home from school earlier than his older brother. This always gave him short opportunities to sneak in and try to use the disposable camera. He was planning on doing so for the entire week, but his conscience (or, more often, his fear of being caught and causing a ruckus) kept him from actually making use of his time. He would anxiously procrastinate. He also had his mom to be wary of. She had

reinforced Jonathan's rules, and getting in trouble with her would make him feel like the scum of the earth. Getting his father angry was terrifying. Getting Jonathan angry was crushing. His mom didn't seem to get angry all that much. Just disappointed. Getting her disappointed made him feel like he had hit the rock bottom of the human race.

Finally, however, he plucked up the courage to go into that room, and he tried taking some photos. He found taking one picture was a little underwhelming, so he took another. Then he took a third picture, and found that the camera wouldn't wind back up again for another photo. He frowned, trying to wind it harder, and beginning to panic. Did he do something wrong? ...Did he break it? He felt panic and regret stir in the pit of his stomach, worrying too much to notice the sounds of his older brother coming into the house until he heard him walking in the hallway. It was too late to escape. Jonathan stepped in the doorway and they both froze upon meeting each other's eyes. Will instantly dropped the camera.

Silence. Jonathan looked physically pained when the camera hit the floor. Now his eyes just fell to it, processing hard.

Anger built up and spilled out in a matter of seconds, and the best Will could do was just to shrink backwards as the older boy rushed over, towering above him. "I'm sorry! *I'm sorry!*" Will cried.

"How many times have I told you to *Never* use my camera!?" Jonathan yelled, getting into Will's face. He snatched the camera and inspected it, protective and fierce. Will opened his mouth to speak, wanting to tell him it might be broken, but he was cut off.

"And then you drop it!? You're lucky that you didn't damage it. Did you take pictures?" Jonathan demanded. Will hesitated to answer. He was afraid of what might happen if he told the truth. He was shaking like a leaf.

"*Did you take pictures?!*" His brother repeated, over enunciating. Will shook his head, letting out a small, panicked noise. Jonathan scowled and went to wind it up. Will closed his eyes tight and braced himself. He shouldn't have lied. Now it was worse. He felt like he was about to cry.

His eyes were jolted open as he was grabbed roughly by the shoulders and was shaken aggressively. "YOU USED ALL OF MY PHOTOS! WHY ARE YOU SUCH A-"

"Jonathan!" The female voice barked, and their mother tore Jonathan from his small shoulders. Will, shocked and devastated, sunk to the floor, his eyes wide. He was hardly processing what was going on, but he felt a small relief that their mom had intervened. "NO. You are NOT going to defend him this time, we told him, and he did it anyway! I told you he wouldn't listen!" Jonathan shouted.

"He's eight years old, Jonathan!" Joyce said. The argument continued as Will slowly slipped away, silently sobbing and wiping his face from tears as he retreated to his own room, shutting the door behind him. He still heard the shouting.

"Why do you always do this!? Why do you always take his side, even when you know it's his fault!?"

"Because he's your younger brother! You're supposed to set an example, and there's already enough chaos in this house as it is!"

"I've done *everything* for him, Mom! What else does he want!?"

"He wants you to stop acting like *this*!"

"I wouldn't be acting like this if he just listened to me! I'm sick of it! I just want ONE thing to myself, is that too much to ask!?"

"...I-"

"He has his own space, so where's mine?" Silence. He heard Jonathan's door shut hard.

Joyce felt like her family was in shambles. Jonathan had continuously told her everything was fine, but she could see in his eyes that he was lying. She worried that Lonnie was making their home feel like it wasn't a safe place. That he was modeling aggressive behavior. What if Jonathan thought that was normal now? ...What if Will thought it was normal? And was school safe for them? Will would tell her about the bullies who insulted him and his friends, and

how sometimes there would be fights. For Jonathan... he was absolutely silent about school. This could be good, but Joyce had a feeling it wasn't. Not knowing her boy. She stood pondering outside Will's closed bedroom door, breathing to calm her shot nerves. Her boys were precious to her. It was heart wrenching to see this conflict between them. She took in one more deep breath before she knocked on Will's door. "Sweetie? ...Are you okay?" She said gently. No reply. She slowly turned the door knob and opened the door, peering inside. The young boy was huddled against his bed on the floor, hiding his face.

She was instantly sitting beside him, pulling him into her arms and rubbing his back. He let out an audible sob. "Oh... Shh, baby, it's okay..." She soothed. He started sputtering words, but it was hard to tell what he was saying. He finally took in a breath and spoke clearly, looking up at her. "He's right. It's my fault, and now he'll never talk to me again." He said. Joyce shook her head, pulling him closer as though she were trying to snuff out his tears.

"He's not going to do that." She said, "He just needs to be alone right now."

"No, he doesn't- he- doesn't like me, Mom. Nobody likes me..."

Those words, and his heartbroken face tore Joyce up inside. Her eyes opened wide. "That's not true. You are so loved, Will. Jonathan cares about you so much, he just needs to have his own space, that's all. He's going through a tough time, and he needs us to support him while that's happening. And right now that means letting him have his room and his things to himself."

Will nodded, looking down. He sniffed as he collected his thoughts. "I don't have enough money to buy him a new camera..." he said. Joyce looked at him, smiling slightly.

"What? Let me double check." She said.

He got up and brought her a small collection of coins. She took them and counted them in her head. He had about two dollars in change. But she wasn't about to let that stand in his way. "Why, this is plenty!" She said. Will blinked, surprised. "Wh-what...?" He asked.

"You'll be able to get a really good camera with this much, actually." She clarified, grinning conspiratorially.

Neither mother nor son knew very much about cameras. At the store,

they had picked out one of the more expensive cameras instead of the disposable ones Jonathan had used ever since he had taken up photography, and as they bought it, Joyce discretely gave the cashier her money instead of Will's; it was a lot more expensive than two dollars, after all. Besides, she wanted Will to have his money. Later, she would sneak his money back into his hiding place while he was at school. He grinned as Joyce handed the box to him to carry with him to the car. "Thanks, mom." He said. Joyce wrapped an arm around her boy and hugged him to her side as they walked.

Jonathan had heard them leave, and stayed in his room until he heard them come back. Their mom had probably taken him out to help him feel better, as usual. He sighed, deciding he ought to push back his still raw feelings and apologize, just like he knew his mother would convince him to do anyway. Before he could go and greet them, however, there was a knock on the door. He tensed. "...Come in." He called. Surprisingly, Will opened the door a crack, peering in cautiously like he usually did, no matter the circumstances. Then the door was pushed further open by Joyce, who stood behind him. Will was nudged forward, and the young boy's eyes fell to the floor as he walked closer to Jonathan and presented a boxed camera. Jonathan stared, processing what he was looking at. It was a new camera. And not just any camera, a really good camera.

"I'm sorry I used your camera, Jonathan..." Will said quietly. Jonathan gingerly took the box and looked at the label on the box. "You're... Wait, you..." He looked at Will, "You got... This is a *really* good camera, there's no way you could've."

Joyce waved her hands to get Jonathan's attention, and then giving a cut-throat motion to stop him from finishing his sentence. He quickly realized she had bought it for Will. His eyes fell back to the gift, irresistibly drawn to it. He opened it and took the camera out, admiring the newness and quality with awe. "Wow..." He uttered quietly, then he laughed, feeling the tension and hurt from before soften away. Not completely gone, but still atoned for by thoughtfulness that he didn't usually receive. "It's good...?" Will asked, smiling nervously.

Jonathan set the camera beside him on his bed, nodding vigorously. "Yes. Thank you. I'm sorry, Will. Thank you." He said, feeling a lump

in his throat. Will hugged his leg, tighter than Jonathan would have liked, but he awkwardly returned the hug as best as he could. He looked up at their mom, who smiled peacefully in the doorway, and he thanked her silently.

Later, in the evening after Will went to bed, he went and thanked his mother with enthusiasm that she hadn't seen in a while. He spilled out his excitement for getting a camera that wasn't disposable; now he didn't have to replace it. He just had to get film when he ran out. He asked her how she knew he wanted that camera, and was so amazed that she actually got it for him when it wasn't his birthday or Christmas. The truth was, she didn't know much about cameras, but she still managed to find the best for her boy. It was well worth the price.

Jonathan still enforced three rules:

1. Don't enter his room when he isn't there.
2. Don't borrow his things without asking.
3. Never, under any circumstances, touch or use his camera. Without asking.

Will followed Jonathan a lot when he was taking pictures, and would ask questions about how the camera was functioning. After all, it was the camera he gave his brother, so he had to make sure it was in proper running order. Jonathan would enthusiastically talk about how much better that camera was, and would ask Will if he wanted him to take a picture of anything. But no matter what, that camera was Jonathan's camera, and it would stay that way. Even when Jonathan was feeling generous and offered to let Will try taking pictures, Will refused. "It's your camera. Taking pictures isn't really my thing, anyway."

4. Holly, Jolly

A/N: Merry Christmas, from your friendly neighborhood dinosaur! I hope it has been splendid! My Christmas was good, even though I got sick and became a *mouthbreather* (Haha get it?). Anywho, here's some Christmas drabbles, brought to you by our boy Will Byers. I couldn't figure out how to properly end this, so I hope that's okay.

English Assignment: In honor of Christmas, I want you to write a paragraph about how you celebrate Christmas with your family. Be sure to use proper grammar and punctuation!

My Christmas

By Will Byers, age 10

Christmas is my family's favorite time of year. These days, we spend it on our own, since our uncle hasn't shown up for the past three years. But according to my brother Jonathan, that's a good thing because he is "a bum". After Thanksgiving, we always try to convince my dad to hang up our Christmas lights, but he doesn't get around to it until a few weeks later. We don't have a lot of Christmas lights to hang up outside, but we have enough to put along the roof. It doesn't look as good as other people's houses, but we like it. This year, our lights wouldn't light up because of one bulb, and we had to take it down after Dad and Jonathan had put it up to find the faulty bulb. It still flickers on and off, so this year we decorated our doorway with the lights so we could reach it easier to fix it when it went out.

We spend more time decorating inside, but Dad lets us do that on our own. He gets a tree, and then we decorate it. We have a lot of fun, because Mom plays her favorite Christmas songs and we put up the ornaments from when she was a kid.

Music blared from a record player and of course, the Byers couldn't sit still to the catchy Christmas tunes. Between hanging glass ornaments they danced and tapped their feet, and sometimes even sang along. Jonathan scanned the mostly-decorated tree for a place to

hang a ball ornament, cradling it gently in his hand with care. The two boys had done plenty of ornament-breaking in their time, and Jonathan had learned to be extra cautious. Will pulled a mouse-shaped ornament and grinned, admiring it, as it had always been his favorite. "There used to be another one to go with that one," Joyce said wistfully, "But I broke it."

Will's eyes widened. "Really? You never told me!" He said, glancing down at his favorite ornament and wondering what the other one might have looked like.

"Yeah. The other one was pink." She grinned. "It was my favorite."

Will blinked, surprised at this fact that he had never known before. She liked the mouse ornament, just like him-albeit the pink one. He smiled and gave the remaining one to her. "You should hang this one up." He said.

"What? No. This one is your favorite, I can't hang it up." She insisted, but he kept pressing it toward her, looking at her with those big, sincere eyes.

"The other one was *your* favorite. I can hang it up next year." He said.

After receiving a hug and a kiss from his mother, he returned to the ornament box to search out a new one. "Hey! You can't put that there, it's too close to the airplane!" Jonathan said, and Joyce laughed playfully.

"You're taking all the fun out of it." She said, poking the young teenager in the side. "I'll hang this wherever I want!"

"He- HEY! Mom, no!" Jonathan protested as she quickly hung it way too close to the airplane anyway, pushing at his shoulder to keep him away. He was getting stronger than her, and she only had enough time to hang the small mouse before he had pushed back against her arm and taken the mouse off to move it over. They fought over it for several minutes, Joyce laughing and Jonathan scowling and taking things a little too seriously before he gave in, finally backing off. However, Joyce ended up hanging the mouse in a place that was open, like he had wanted all along.

During December, my mom tries to cook traditional Christmas meals and desserts. Turkey, cookies, gingerbread men. She isn't a good cook, so Jonathan usually tries to save the day. We are used to eating burnt food.

Smoke billowed from the oven and filled the kitchen within seconds. Joyce and Jonathan coughed heavily, and Will walked into the kitchen to watch, having smelled the smoke from the living room. "No! No, no, no, no," Joyce spewed out protests and curses, which she tried not to do in front of Will, but she couldn't help it. Jonathan quickly pulled out the smoking bird, waving an extra oven mitt by his face to clear the smoke. "It's bad, this is bad, I knew I should have gotten it pre-made..." Joyce moaned, running her hands through her hair.

"It's fine, mom. Maybe the meat is still okay." Jonathan said, searching for a knife and a fork.

"NO! It's gonna be too dry!" Joyce exclaimed, shaking from exasperation. Jonathan ignored her, as if to silently assure her that it would be fine. He cut it open, and squinted past the rising steam to look at the meat inside. Joyce hovered over his shoulder, distressed but still curious. "Well? ... *Well?*"

Jonathan forked at the meat, frowning, then he looked at his mother, sighing. "It's a little dry." He said, then quickly spoke again to keep her from exclaiming her deep despair. "But we'll just put some gravy on it, it'll be fine! That's why we picked out that can of gravy, anyway."

Joyce spewed curses anyway, and could only be silenced by the touch of Will's hands clutching at her arm. "It'll be good, mom!" He chimed, grinning up at her with his most sincere smile. He glanced back at Jonathan, and they silently agreed that they would make sure that *this was the best Christmas turkey ever*, even though it was far it.

Joyce held back tears as she and her boys made the best of her failed cooking, but they still chimed with "Mmm"s and "This is actually pretty good!"s. Her mother had always made delicious meals during

the holidays, and just in general, but this was a standard that she simply couldn't live up to. Thankfully she had Jonathan there to save the day. She put down her fork ten minutes into the meal. "You know what? Let's go out to eat." She said. Jonathan and Will glanced at each other, hardly believing their ears. "Come on. Let's go to Benny's. You two deserve better."

"What about Dad?" Will asked.

Joyce shook her head. "He can have this." She deadpanned, and both boys' mouths dropped open. Yet, they didn't argue.

My mom has us write Christmas lists and hang them on the fridge for her to look at. I help her find the things on Jonathan's list and we put one of the gifts as from me, and I think Jonathan does the same thing for me. He usually finds a way to surprise me, though. My parents are hard to get gifts for, especially my dad. Since we have trouble getting them presents, my mom will pick things for herself for us to wrap. My dad doesn't really want things. He just buys whatever he wants whenever he wants it, so he doesn't always have any presents. He doesn't mind it though.

Every year we go to the Wheeler's Christmas party, and I get to spend time with my friends. After the party, I get to stay over for a few nights, and we play Dungeons and Dragons. Every year I try to get Jonathan to stay and play with us. He isn't ever interested. Even though it's the Wheelers' party, it's pretty much our biggest tradition. Mom makes us dress up, even though we're just with friends.

On Christmas Eve, mom lets us open one present before we go to bed. Then, in the morning, we aren't allowed to go and open our presents until my parents are awake. Usually me and Jonathan wake up really early and have to wait for mom and dad to get up.

"Jonathan!" Will hissed, peering through the doorway of his brother's room. "Merry Christmas!"

A grunt came in reply. Will slipped inside the room and inched to the side of the bed, where his teenage brother was sprawled out in a tangle of bedsheets. "It's time to get up!" Will persisted stubbornly, poking Jonathan's shoulder.

"Mom and Dad won't be up for a while. Go back to bed." Jonathan mumbled, moving away from Will.

"So? We always get up early."

More grumbles.

"Please?" Will begged. Jonathan slowly sat up, rubbing his eyes.

"Fine." He muttered. With a low whoop of excitement, Will dragged his tired brother into the hallway, where they would do their annual waiting.

"Do you think Santa brought us a dog?" Will whispered conspiratorially as he sat on the floor across from Jonathan. Jonathan shrugged. It had been a routine topic of discussion the entire year for the two brothers. And from the looks of things, they had pretty high chances, seeing as their father actually wasn't against the idea. Still, having a dog would be another mouth to feed (and more money to spend).

The two spent thirty minutes waiting, Will trying to keep his brother's energy up. Even though it had little purpose, waiting in the hallway on Christmas morning was a necessity. It was a strange little tradition that had only been made because sometimes Santa Claus hadn't put everything under the tree in time, and Joyce had to make sure everything was there before the kids came tearing down on their gifts.

The moment their parents' bedroom door opened, the two were instantly going to the tree, Jonathan's tiredness being stifled by excitement that couldn't be outgrown. The boys opened their gifts and tried to hold back a small amount of disappointment that there wasn't even a hint to getting a dog. The familiar mix of joy from what they did receive was sort of hollowed out by their disappointment, and it was unusually quiet.

Until the word "shelter" was mentioned by their mother, and all the energy that was usually there on Christmas morning finally arrived.

We don't have a lot of traditions in my family. But every year we

have fun with each other, and I guess that's why we like it so much. I like getting presents, but just celebrating this time with my family is my favorite part. This year, I hope we get a dog. Me and Jonathan have planned everything out since the summer. I can't wait to see if we actually get one. Merry Christmas!

5. Those Summer Nights

There was a period of time where Jonathan and Will's uncle stayed at the Byers household, and took Will's bedroom.

To them, he just... showed up one day. They didn't know he had called, without a place to stay, from a telephone booth up in the city, begging to stay with them for a while. Just to get back on his feet. They also didn't know he had a drinking problem. To them, he just pulled up to their house, and the boys, recognizing his car, ran up to greet him.

"Uncle Howard!"

"Hey, boys! How are ya? Jon, you're gettin' tall. Lookin' good, lookin' good. And... Gosh, how old are you now, Will?"

"Six."

"Six! You're growin' up!... You'll start growing a bunch, soon enough, I'm sure. It's good to see you, boys..."

He looked tired. And dirty. His hat was tipped low, almost over his eyes, but he pushed it back when he spoke to the two kids. He shifted his bags in his arms.

"Lonnie here, yet?" He asked, almost anxiously, as he walked slowly to the door.

"Yeah. He's inside watching TV." Jonathan replied.

Howard grinned. "Can't wait to see him again. It's been a while."

When the two brothers were united, it became loud with chatter, mostly from Howard. Lonnie was more friendly than Will and Jonathan had seen him in a long time. Joyce even joined the conversation, smiling warmly, albeit wringing her hands. She felt nervous about having him stay, especially for so long. But Lonnie was uncharacteristically adamant about it, and Howard was so sincerely grateful, it eased her down. The boys listened curiously, wondering why he would come to visit so unexpectedly, but their conversation

gave no clues to an answer.

Howard slept on the couch that night, but soon it became clear that Uncle Howard was here to stay for an extended period of time. This was fine, because the boys liked their uncle. He told stories about the city, he had a loud, jolly, contagious laugh, and he knew some fun card games. But, things changed because of his presence. One thing in particular was different.

Howard took Will's room.

That summer, Will's mattress was moved into Jonathan's room, and there they shared that space.

Sometimes they would stay up late at night, playing games with only the light of their flashlight to illuminate their cards. Jonathan was a strategic expert, and would smirk behind the shield of his deck before seemingly taking over the entire game in one swift blow. Then they got bored of cards, and wanted to play other board games.

Whispering to each other conspiratorially as they hovered by the bedroom door, listening in case of any adults in the hallway or the living room. Sometimes a parent or their uncle would stay up late. "Do you hear anything?" Will whispered a little too loudly. He had his ear pressed to the crack of the door, and he was leaning against the wood for extra measure, as though keeping his entire body as close to the door as possible would enhance his hearing. Jonathan quickly shushed him. The older boy opened the door a crack, peering out. For what felt like an eternity, Jonathan waited, and listened. They both looked stone-faced, determined to fulfill their mission. Then he opened the door quietly, nodding to his partner-in-crime.

They swiftly crept down the hallway, and started to turn into the living room where the board games were stored. Their end goal was in sight. But then, they heard a noise.

A very, *very* loud snore. Right underneath their feet, in fact. They stopped dead in their tracks when they heard the noise and Will's leg crashed into the heavy body of Uncle Howard sleeping *on the floor*. Will nearly tripped over him, and was trying to keep his surprised

scream a whisper. Jonathan grabbed him by the shoulder and pulled him back, and they made a beeline back into their room. They didn't even know if Uncle Howard woke up, but the fear (and somewhat excitement) of being caught had taken them by full force. Jonathan was practically pushing Will forward, making him go faster back into their safe haven. The moment they got in, they shut the door, almost slamming it.

Breathing hard, they looked at each other, wide eyed, and laughed, feeling free to be a little louder now that they were back in their room. "That was close." Jonathan said.

Will nodded. "I almost fell."

"Yeah... What was Uncle Howard doing out there? The TV wasn't on." Jonathan wondered aloud. Will shrugged and sat on his mattress.

"Maybe he likes to sleep on the floor. I like having my bed on the floor here," Will commented.

Jonathan's nose scrunched up and he shook his head. "I can't see how anyone would want to sleep on the floor, especially in the living room."

They settled into their beds, and looked up at the ceiling. They had been up in the darkness long enough for their eyes to have adjusted completely. Now the light of the moon filtered through the window and was extremely distracting. Their hearts still raced. "We can try again tomorrow." Jonathan decided with a sigh.

Will was pretty disappointed. But they would see their mission through. "Do you want to play cards instead?" He asked.

Jonathan shook his head. "No, I'm tired of cards."

"Please? I can't sleep."

Jonathan huffed. Admittedly, he was disappointed too. But the thrill of the mission was still fun enough for him. "..No."

"We can make a *new* card game," Will suggested.

This didn't turn out very well. Jonathan tried to think of some rules to apply to Will's ideas, but they all ended up creating nonsensical disasters one after the other. Eventually they were both too tired to proceed, and they crawled back into their beds to finally sleep.

In the morning, as Joyce prepared breakfast (and Jonathan helped with making eggs, as he had taken an interest in cooking), Will looked at their uncle, wondering about the discovery they made last night. He looked awful, his eyes drooping heavily and his head sinking downward every couple of minutes before he would jerk it back up, clutch his head with a groan, and then down his coffee before getting another cup full. He kept muttering and rubbing his temples.

Suddenly, Will piped up when he sat down with his third cup of coffee: "Do you like to sleep on the floor?"

Jonathan froze rigid. *Don't blow our cover. Don't do it.* He knew Will could *not* keep a secret for the life of him. Joyce and Lonnie just looked puzzled.

Uncle Howard blinked, his shoulders tensing and his mouth opening to utter a barely noticeable sound. He glanced at Joyce, then he grumbled about his head and looked down at the table. Will kept his intent stare, trying to read his uncle's strange behavior. Finally, Uncle Howard met him in the eye to answer.

"It's more comfortable, sometimes." He said with a shrug, "Why do you wanna know?"

Will shrugged, realizing he would give away that he and Jonathan stayed up past their bedtime, and even snuck out of their room if he told the truth. He hesitated, then he shrugged in a not very convincing way. Thankfully, when you are six years old, you can get away with asking strange questions. The adults continued on, and Jonathan internally sighed with relief.

In hindsight, they obviously could have gotten the board games in daylight, but that wouldn't have been as exciting. Part of it was the thrill of the mission, and the subtle rule-breaking of sneaking out of their room at night, even though in reality they probably wouldn't

have gotten in very much trouble for doing so. When they scoped out the living room the next night, having given their eyes time to adjust to the darkness so they could cautiously peer from the hallway to the living room, they found the coast clear. They dashed over to the collection of board games and quietly started looking through them.

"I can't see which one is which," Will complained, straining his eyes to look at the covers. He could vaguely figure out the box for The Game of Life, because of the worn edges of the box from its years of use, starting with their mother when she was young. He grabbed it and pulled it out from the stack, causing some noise as the boxes on top fell over.

Jonathan bit his tongue to keep from using a mild curse he had overheard. "Just grab as many as you can!" He hissed, looking around cautiously. He seized the boxes that fell over and started a dash for their room. Will, not wanting to be left alone, grabbed two more games and ran after him, slipping through the door before Jonathan closed it.

Jonathan clicked on his flashlight and grinned as he eyed their prizes. Mission: accomplished. "Good job." He told the younger boy with an affirming nod.

Will beamed, feeling as though he might as well have been encouraged by Captain America.

They played Monopoly. They didn't get very much sleep at all.

Sometimes they would just lay in their respective beds and stare up at the ceiling as they talked about everything, but also nothing at all. Just simple things. There was a lot that they didn't understand about the world, but there was some strange wisdom they found in their simple conversations.

"I wonder what kind of worlds are in space..."

"They think that earth is the only inhabitable planet. That's what I learned in science class."

"I don't think so."

"Yeah. They can't even go to Mars because it's so far away, so there's not really any way to know for sure."

"I wish I could go to space."

"... I don't know if I would want to, even if I could."

Will lifted his head from his pillow. "Why not?"

"I don't know... What if there really is nothing there?" Jonathan wondered, staring up at the ceiling seriously.

"But... why would there be so much space if there wasn't anything in it?"

That was a pretty good point. The older boy pondered this, his mouth half open to potentially respond with some sort of reference to what he had learned at school. But he couldn't think of anything.

"In the future, we'll probably be able to visit it any time we want." Will said, picturing the hopeful and technological utopia of the *future*. It almost felt like a separate world from their own, just imagining it. "Then we'll be able to see for ourselves."

"That would be cool..."

"And I could show you I'm right."

Jonathan sat up indignantly. "There's no way to know for sure until we get there!" He retorted.

"I know, but... I think I'm right." Will replied simply, with a shrug.

Jonathan rolled his eyes and grunted as he flopped back down on his bed.

Will could not, for the life of him, fall asleep. Not after he and his older brother had stayed up reading scary stories.

"You won't get scared, will you?" Jonathan had asked as he sat on the floor between his own bed and Will's mattress. He was already opening the book, and his question was obviously a challenge to the younger boy. Will shook his head, trying to seem a lot more confident than he was. In fact, he was actually already getting scared just by the anticipation.

"No! I won't!" He said, scooting over from his mattress to sit beside Jonathan, taking his blanket with him to cocoon himself with.

Will did get scared. Really scared. Somehow, every normal object had turned sinister, and a potential sign of a ghost or a monster.

Phantoms can go through walls, and if they go through you, you die and turn into one too.

All kinds of monsters have gotten used to living in sewers, and under houses. If they catch you, no one will ever find you.

He would hear the sound of scraping against the house and he just *knew* it was a monster. He didn't want to wake Jonathan up, though. He didn't want his older brother to know he was scared. He curled up into a ball, tightening the grip on his blanket around himself to feel more secure. Underneath drawers, doors, and Jonathan's bed, it looked like pure darkness. It felt like anything could crawl out from the black and take the small boy with them. For a moment, as the darkness started playing tricks on his eyes, he could have sworn he saw little black insects crawling from underneath Jonathan's bed and swarming toward him. He knew that what was underneath Jonathan's bed were Jonathan's toys, which he loved and longed to play with, but this night, they seemed to disappear from there. A place so inviting during the day was suddenly enveloped by dark mystery.

He sat up, shaking, and his eyes fixed themselves to reveal that there were no black insects. But it didn't matter. It felt real. "Jonathan?" He spoke in a weak, hesitant voice. The older boy seemed to be fast asleep, still.

Then, he heard it. A voice. It sounded like it came from outside. It moaned quietly, almost blending completely in with the wind. But

there was no mistaking it.

It was a phantom. It was going to go through the walls and then find him. Fear turned to full-blown panic. "Jonathan. Jonathan." He urged, loud but still suppressed of his bubbling emotion as he. He was backing away towards the door, subconsciously already drawing toward his homing-system safe place: his parents' room.

"Wh..." Jonathan mumbled, not wanting to wake up.

"Jonathan! Jonathan, IT'S-!" Will's voice rose sharply.

Suddenly, Jonathan flew up out of bed, looking around wildly, his eyes wide. "What!?" For a moment, the fear in his younger brother's voice made him feel afraid-and somewhat protective. But he didn't see anything for Will to be scared of, or even threatened by. He calmed down, but Will still remained terrified. "Will, there's nothing-"

Will pointed and almost incoherently spilled out words, but there was "phantom" and "outside", and Jonathan quickly rushed over and attempted to clap a hand over the young boy's mouth before he grew any louder. Will pushed his hand away.

"The phantom is here and he's gonna-" Will blubbered, moving away from Jonathan and towards the door.

There was no way their mother would let Jonathan live it down if she found out he had read scary stories to Will. So there was no way Jonathan was letting him leave that room.

"Will. Will! Stop!" Jonathan hissed in a loud whisper as he tried to grab the surprisingly slippery boy. "It's not real! There's no phantom, there's no such thing!"

He had grabbed and restrained the panicking boy just before he grabbed the door handle to flee, and tried to suppress the desperate attempts of escape from his arms, but Jonathan just held tighter as he raised his voice above a whisper. "It's all made up, Will!"

"I heard it!" Will protested, pulling free as soon as Jonathan loosened his grip on him after he was pulled away from the door. "I heard a- a voice outside!"

"It was your imagination!"

"No, I'm telling you, it was real! I swear!" Will's eyes were as wide as saucers. He was avidly convinced. Jonathan rolled his eyes, dismissing his young brother's claims.

Then they both heard it. Except instead of a moan it was more like a low voice combined with a horrible, loud, retching sound. Jonathan stiffened. Will shuddered with horror.

That night, they didn't take any chances. They both guiltlessly invaded their parent's bedroom for safety.

Years later when they talked about that surreal experience, Will always wondered what that voice actually was. Joyce and eventually Jonathan seemed to have an idea, but they didn't tell him their thoughts until much later. Maybe, he thought, it was because they didn't want him to be scared.

"Do you see anything?" Jonathan asked in his best authoritative tone as he spoke into his clunky plastic wrist watch, pretending it was a communication device. He peered down from his bed and onto the floor, where all of his toys were moved out from under his bed to make room for Will to investigate underground. They were about to stop the evil henchmen of an underground lab, and Jonathan was the head of the mission.

"No, Commander. It's... It's empty. The lab is completely empty." Will reported, honestly. There was nothing underneath the bed, since Jonathan had moved his toys out.

Jonathan rolled his eyes. "*Are you sure?*" He demanded, subtly hinting to Will that he needed to improvise a little more.

"Um... Uh..." Will quickly tried to think of some plot twist to develop the plot, like Jonathan usually did in their games. "Wait! Commander, I- I think it's a trap!"

"A trap!?" Jonathan immediately jumped on board.

"Yes! I- BZZZT!" Will added static sound effects dramatically. "Bzzzt!

I... Think... BZZT! OH NO! HELP..."

"DON'T WORRY, I'M COMING!" Jonathan declared, a little too loud, as he leapt of the bed.

Will stuck his arm out from under the bed. "Help me! NOOOOOO..." He slowly started to pull his arm back.

Jonathan grabbed his arm. "I've got you, Corporal! We're going to get you out of there!" He tugged Will out from under the bed with some effort, and when Will was finally rescued from the lab, he lay there, dead. He was confirmed dead, because his tongue was sticking out. Although he was laughing every couple of seconds.

"No! Corporal! Pull yourself together, you can't die!" Jonathan exclaimed, grabbing Will by the shoulders. "STAY WITH ME, CORPORAL! We need you!" He shook Will way too hard, which made Will burst into a fit of laughter.

"I'm-" Will tried to suppress his laugh, "I'm alive!" He declared.

The footsteps of their mother could be heard before the door was suddenly opened, and Joyce peered inside with a frown, her eyelids heavy. "Boys. It's bedtime."

Jonathan stood up, looking almost a little embarrassed. He nodded solemnly, his mood having shifted drastically from before, which confused Will a little bit.

Will looked between his mother and Jonathan, before looking down at the floor and sighing. "Okay..."

Joyce, noticing her boys' different reactions, couldn't help but smile a little, despite them having woken up her and Lonnie (and possibly Uncle Howard, but she didn't know for sure). "What were you two doing?" She asked, curiously.

Jonathan started to think of a way to explain. "Oh. Um, we were..."

"We were investigating some evil headquarters, and I died, but then Jonathan and the rest of the team rescued me!" Will answered excitedly.

Joyce grinned and laughed a little. "I'm glad you made it out okay," She said. It was hard to be mad, but she tried to keep from melting too much. "But... It is bedtime, so save it for tomorrow."

Still, she could hear them talking as she walked away.

"I'm not tired..."

"Well, we can't end there. We need a better ending spot."

After Uncle Howard left in the fall, things went back to normal. But they didn't feel normal. For a while, it felt strange to both the boys to have a room all to their own again, even though Jonathan was still happy to have his space to himself again. It felt unnatural to lay alone in the silence, especially after all the times they shared together during that long summer. Most nights were spent talking while laying over their blankets in an attempt to stay cool in the hot weather, helping each other pass the time until they drifted to sleep as they suffered in the heat.

But soon enough, the change back to what was once normal became blended back into their routine, and they didn't feel as distant from each other just being in different rooms like they did for those first weeks. It faded from their reality into memory. But it was okay.

After all, Will would still spend as much time in Jonathan's room as he could, even though he had his own.

6. Without You

A/N: I'm working on a longer chapter, and I was meaning to finish and post it sooner than this, but... it's just taking a while. So I made this for y'all in the meantime. I want to update more frequently than I have been. So, in the meantime, enjoy! Thanks for sticking with me! ~PlaidDino

It was on Jonathan's fifteenth birthday when Will suddenly had a realization that he never considered before.

He never worried about it before; he never thought about growing older, and even if he did, he knew that nothing would change in his world. Until Jonathan turned fifteen.

Joyce and Will made plans to surprise Jonathan weeks ahead of time. They would go out to eat, they would go to the record store, and then they would have his favorite cake waiting for him at home. It was small, but heartfelt. Jonathan never liked having a big hoopla for his birthday anyway. And, when the day came, after school, they went through with their plans. They had a good time. Jonathan was allowed to pick any music he wanted, and he proceeded to show Will all of the best artists as he picked up albums on tape. As they left the record store, Jonathan put an arm around his mother, who was now at an equal height to him-even a little bit shorter, if you really looked. Will chatted excitedly on their way home, asking Jonathan about the music he picked out and already wanting to listen to all of the songs.

Then when they got home, Lonnie was home early to present his oldest son with a pair of boots and give him a slightly painful embrace. Then he looked Jonathan in the eye. "Pretty soon you'll be working." He said.

And that's when Will realized. *Pretty soon.* *Pretty soon* Jonathan would be working. *Pretty soon* he would be driving. Then, *pretty soon* Jonathan will leave for college. *Pretty soon*, Will would be all alone. *Pretty soon*, his brother, his friend since birth, wouldn't be there with him all the time, like he had always been. What would it be like?

Sure, Will would be older. It was still three years away. But three years wasn't that far away, was it? The days were numbered.

As candles were lit on a birthday cake, and Jonathan tried his best to tolerate being sung to, Will tried to stop thinking about it. He tried to keep smiling. He tried to cover the anxieties bubbling up inside of him. Normally, Will would relish in eating a sweet, chocolatey dessert, but he couldn't fully enjoy it because of the thoughts that wouldn't stay away.

After the celebrations were over, Jonathan stood up. "You wanna give these songs a listen?" He asked Will with a grin as he held up some of his new tapes.

Will tried to give his best smile. "Um... Yeah, I will in a bit." He replied.

He was obviously not hiding his feelings very well, because Jonathan looked confused and concerned. "Oh... Okay. Is something-"

"Hey, Jon! Let me see you in those boots!" Came Lonnie's voice from near the television.

Jonathan sighed, a little irritated. "Okay!" He called back, then he gave Will a look as though to say, *'You're gonna tell me what's wrong'*. "Hold that thought." He said, then he went over to their father.

Will felt a small amount of relief that he was let off the hook. He took the moment to slip out the back door and sit outside, emotions rising and forming a lump in his throat. Their dog immediately ran over to him, ears pinned back and tail wagging in greeting. Will sighed and stroked the face of the scruffy dog, wishing he didn't feel the way he did. He should be happy that his brother might go to college. But try as he might, he kept wondering how he could ever live without him. Why did Jonathan have to be so much older? He found himself sniffing, and realized he was starting to tear up. He quickly started wiping his eyes, trying to smother the tears away before they started to fall. The dog wandered off, becoming distracted after receiving no petting for a minute. Then Will heard the door open and the dog looked toward the door, eyes bright and excited to greet another person. Will looked down, feeling some dread. He didn't want to see

who it was.

Then he just felt the person sit down next to him. "Hey."

Jonathan. Will tried to pull himself together.

"Alright. What's wrong?" The older brother asked, leaning forward so he could get a better look at Will's lowered face and putting a hand on his shoulder.

"Nothing." Will replied quickly, looking at Jonathan and hoping his eyes didn't have that tell-tale sheen of tears on them. Jonathan's frown only deepened. "I... Hey, you wanna show me your new songs now?"

That offer was blatantly ignored. Jonathan gave him that look that was both protective and interrogational. "Spill it."

"No! I'm *fine*." Will insisted, trying to smile to show just how fine he was.

"Alright, then why have you been looking like you saw a ghost ever since we got home?" Jonathan asked, narrowing his eyes. "Yeah. Don't think I didn't notice."

Darn it. Darn it. Why did Jonathan have to *know* him so well? Still... maybe that's another reason Will was going to miss him so much. He looked away, sighing shakily. "I was just... Thinking about how you're gonna go away in a few years. That's all." He confessed.

"I don't know about that *for sure*." Jonathan remarked, an edge of bitterness in his tone.

"No!" Will protested, turning to look at him with wide eyes, and a face hardened in assurance. "You *will*. I know you will."

Jonathan opened his mouth to retort something about their lack of money, or his disinterest in school, or even their father controlling his decisions, but Will looked *so sure*. There wasn't a trace of doubt in his abilities in the boy's eyes-so much so, Jonathan felt a little better about his situation. He shrugged slightly, looking away. "We'll see."

Will frowned at him, now starting to feel concern for his older brother's doubts. "Come on. You'll make it all work out. You always do." He said firmly.

Jonathan laughed a little, shrugging his shoulders again. He redirected the conversation. "Then what's bothering you?"

The discomfort once again fell onto Will. "I don't know... Things will just be different, I guess. I want you to be able to go, but..."

I'll miss you.

"It would be weird not having you around."

Jonathan just looked at him for a long moment, his eyes widening slightly. Then his expression softened. "Hey. Nothing is ever gonna change, you got that?"

"You say that now, but... I mean..." Will's voice cracked as he struggled to think of the words. Correction: the words that wouldn't make all of his emotions pour out. "I don't want to be alone." He just managed to say in a shaky voice.

Jonathan's hand was on his shoulder again, clutching tight for emphasis. "I'm not going to leave you and Mom behind."

Will nodded. "I know..."

"And if I go to college, I'll visit as often as I can. And you can go visit me." Jonathan added, smiling a little.

Will nodded again, looking at his feet. He made a small noise, once again fighting a lump in his throat.

"Hey. Hey. No distance is gonna make us less of a family. You and Mom..." Jonathan paused, a small realization of his own coming upon him. Something bittersweet. "You're all I have."

They didn't say anything more for a little while. They just sat beside each other, looking off at the same treetops against the same sky that they had always known. And it was okay. They didn't really need to say anything. Like many times before, they had a way of

communicating to each other even greater just by being there for each other. And Will slowly felt the impending feeling of emotion trying to slip out start to calm down. This would never change. Some things might, but they would always have each other.

Eventually, Will stood up and exhaled deeply. "Okay. I think I'm good now."

Jonathan grinned and stood up as well, towering above him. "Cool."

"Cool." Will echoed, grinning back.

His mom was starting to fall apart, and he felt helpless on his own. He needed her. Especially now. She was all he had left. Now that Will was gone.

They had found his body in the lake. Jonathan's stomach still twisted just thinking about it. He felt like he was about to throw up and sob at the same time at several points throughout the next few days. But he couldn't. He had to be the strong one. For Will. Will deserved it.

Now, as he stood looking at a coffin that would soon hold his brother, the one he was supposed to protect, as the man working at the store told him all about how the casket was made, Jonathan wondered how he would ever live without him.